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Dr. Lowell's

DEDICATION SERMON.

THE NAME OF CHRISTIAN THE ONLY APPROPRIATE NAME FOR BELIEVERS IN CHRIST.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE DEDICATION

OF THE

THIRD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

IN CAMBRIDGE.

DEC. 25, 1827.

BY CHARLES LOWELL,
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SERMON.

ACTS xi. 16.

THE DISCIPLES WERE CALLED CHRISTIANS FIRST AT ANTIOCH.

We have, in this verse, the only account that is given us of the origin of the name we bear as believers in the divine mission of Jesus Christ. Previous to this, the disciples of Christ were called by the Jews Nazareens, or Galileans, and by each other believers, disciples, brethren, or saints. They now assumed the name of their founder, or master, as the Platonists, Pythagoreans, and others, did of theirs.

Having given this account of the origin of this appellation, it may be supposed that I might well stop,—for what doctrine can be learned, or what practical instruction derived, from the simple fact that *the disciples were called christians first at Antioch?*—This simple fact is, in my view, fraught with instruction of no little moment.

I take up a "Dictionary of Religions," and find I know not how many hundred names of sects into

which the christian world is divided. And when I behold these ensigns of party distinction, these badges of submission, as they too often are, to human authority, my perplexed and agitated mind goes back to repose itself at Antioch, where the "believers," the "brethren," they who "were of one heart and one mind," were content with the simple appellation which denoted their allegiance to their divine master.

I propose, in the following discourse, to present a few, among many, reasons for an adherence to the example of the first disciples in the use of the name *Christian*, and that name only, as the designation of our religious faith.

I. In the first place, because it is the only appropriate name, as it is the only name which denotes at once the source from which our religion is derived.

II. In the second place, because it is the name which was adopted by the believers, as we have seen, in the first, and, perhaps I need not hesitate to say, in the purest, age of the church. They who were best acquainted with the mind and will of Christ, when they assumed a name as distinctive of their sect, assumed this name, and this alone.

III. In the third place, because it is the only name which can serve as a bond of union among the believers in Christ. It is the only name which expresses our common faith. It is the only ground on which believers can stand, and act together in defence of their religion, and in promoting the great purposes for which it was given them. All acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Master, but though they have other

"lords" and masters, "many," there is no other to whom all unite in paying homage.

IV. In the fourth place, because the assumption of another name, instead of promoting union, promotes *disunion* among the believers in Christ.

Any other name is the name of a party in the bosom of the christian community, and party implies separation, division,—must I not say,—some degree of alienation? Is not an exclusive spirit engendered, which causes the affections to move in a narrow circle, and shuts up the heart against all who are without that circle?

Every new name is a new barrier,—a new partition wall,—between the disciples of the same religion. When parties are formed, and names assumed, hostile bands are arrayed against each other, and the adherents of each, coming often in contact and acting together, are strengthened, and fortified, and embittered, in their opposition. The sanguine act upon the moderate, the over-zealous upon those whose zeal is better tempered, and a flame is kindled which, instead of diffusing a kindly, genial heat, spreads around it destruction and desolation.

Importance is given to differences of opinion which are of little or no importance in themselves, and new differences arise which, without this opposition and combination, would have no existence. The very names themselves, claimed by one party, and denied to them by another,—as if *things* were not enough to contend about,—are the subjects of contention.

I may add, if I have not already sufficiently expressed it, that this very separation prevents that interchange of thought and feeling which would lead to a juster estimate of each other's religious opinions and character, and to a nearer assimilation. Many are kept asunder who else would know, and honour, and love one another, and many, from the same cause, remain in error, who might otherwise *be brought to the knowledge of the truth.*

V. In the fifth place, because the adoption of any other name than christian, as the name of a party, excites a spirit of proselytism, or at least brings it into action, and gives it force and efficacy.

I object not to a spirit of proselytism, when its object is to bring the unenlightened to the knowledge of christianity, or the vicious and unholy to virtue and holiness. But I *do* object to the spirit of proselytism when its paramount object is to make converts to the dogmas of a sect.—It is this spirit which, in times that are gone by, has prepared the tortures and kindled the fires of persecution. It is the same spirit which, in later times, has uttered invectives, and propagated falsehoods, and pronounced anathemas.

I object not to the spirit—object not did I say?—I admire the spirit which would bring every thing that bears the image of its God into the christian fold. I admire the spirit which goes forth upon the wings of love and mercy to the regions of ignorance, and debasement, and misery, wherever they are. I admire the spirit which would pour the light of divine truth on the eyes that are spiritually blind, that

would warm, with the genial influences of our holy religion, the hearts that are chilled and frozen by the terrors of superstition, that would open the prison doors and proclaim to the captive *the liberty wherewith Christ hath made his disciples free.* I admire the spirit that would rear in the wilderness a temple for the Most High, and cause the knees that had bowed to idols, to bend before the ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD.

I reverence the man, let him bear what name he will, and go under what auspices he may, who, with a sincere and heartfelt devotion to the cause, encounters *perils by sea and land, perils of the heathen and in the wilderness;—who is in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness,* that he may carry the bread of life to them that are *perishing for lack of knowledge.*

I do earnestly desire the spread of the gospel, and I would stretch forth my feeble arm to help it forward; but when I do so,—I am embarrassed by calvinistic missions, and arminian missions, orthodox missions, and liberal missions.—I approve of all, and I approve of neither.—I commend the christian zeal that would *cause the parched ground to become a pool,* but I deprecate the sectarian zeal that would make its waters bitter. When!—oh when!—will the time arrive, that the heralds of the gospel will not only "go out with joy," but "be led forth with *peace;*" when the taunting reproof will no longer be addressed to them, "Settle among *yourselves* what your religion is, and *then* we will determine whether to embrace it;"—when they

will be ambitious of no other name than the name of their Saviour; and, like their great predecessor, will determine to *know nothing among* the heathen *save Jesus Christ and him crucified!*

VI. In the sixth place, because the adoption of any other name than christian, tends to shackle the mind, to prevent the free, unbiassed, exercise of its powers in the investigation of truth.

When we join a party, we become in some sort pledged to the support and defence of the opinions of that party; and we are in no little danger of imbibing opinions which might not have been the result of our own free and unfettered inquiry. The habit of considering ourselves as belonging to a party,—the reading and intercourse to which it leads,—the very spirit of party itself,—all conspire to this end. Our religious opinions,—if they can be called ours,—are thus apparently the effect of accidental circumstances, of the position in which we have unfortunately been placed, or have still more unfortunately placed ourselves,—for receiving them. If we are able to give a reason for our faith, it is not our own; it is taken at second hand; it is probably, with most, the result of a very limited, partial examination, an attention to one side, without remembering what the wise man has long ago so wisely said, that *He that is first in his own cause seemeth just, but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.*

VII. In the seventh place, because by the adoption of another name than christian,—by thus attaching ourselves to a particular party in the christian church,—if we do not imbibe, or do not in fact defend, all

the opinions of that party, we yet give the sanction of our name, and thus far, of our influence, to opinions which we do not approve.

The opinions of a majority of the party, or of the most forward and active of the party, nay,—perhaps even of the most extravagant of the party, will be considered—do what we will—by the community, as the opinions of the whole. At least, all will be regarded as viewing them without much disapprobation, if not with complacency. We may lift up our feeble voice against them,—if indeed we have firmness and independence enough to do so,—but it will be heard only within a narrow circle. It will be overpowered by the louder and more earnest voice of party zeal.

Every party must, sooner or later, have its creed, not in one particular only, but in all particulars. It will be given in the religious publications of the party, or at the dedication of a church, or the ordination of a minister, and, however different it may be, in many respects, from the faith of an individual who bears the same name, he must submit, as patiently as he may, to the imputation of holding it, or enter, in his own person, and without disguise, upon the thorny, endless path of controversy.

VIII. In the eighth and last place, because the assumption of another name than christian, is pointedly reproved by an eminent apostle of Christ. "For it hath been declared unto me," he saith to the Corinthians, "that there are contentions among you. Eve-
"ry one of you saith, one I am of Paul, and I of Apollos,
"and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?

" Was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized into " the name of Paul? Who is Paul and who is Apollos, " but ministers by whom ye have believed? Let no " man glory in men, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Ce- " phas. Ye are *Christ's* and Christ is GOD's."

And who, I may ask, are those whose names have been adopted, in later times, as the badge of party, but teachers by whom their followers have believed? Some of them have written works more voluminous, and certainly more involved and obscure, than the bible, to show what the bible hath taught. How much better is it, to go at once to Christ and learn of him.

To all this it may be answered, *first*, that names are necessary to distinguish the opinions of one individual from those of another.

It will appear, I think, from what has been said, that this end is by no means answered; that, on the contrary, they rather serve to confound and mislead. Even where there is an explicit assent to a certain formula, there is not always an agreement in all the particulars which compose it. It is this which has given rise to the practice of subscribing "for substance," or, as our fathers did, for "substance and scope," or "substance, scope, and end." It was best known to themselves what they meant by this. It serves only to show into what a dilemma good men are brought by taking a party name.

But I want no such distinction among christians as this is designed to give. If an individual chooses to promulgate his views, he may do so. If he does

not choose it, it is well. *To his own master he standeth or falleth.* He is amenable for his religious faith, not to his christian brother, but to God. It is enough for me to know that he receives the scriptures as of divine authority, and endeavours to obey them.

I do not pretend to indifference respecting the doctrines of the gospel. There are doctrines which I value above all price, and they are doctrines, too, about which there is dissent and controversy among christians. They are doctrines which I feel myself bound to teach and enforce.—My christian brother differs from me on some of these points, and widely differs, but if his faith, though not so scriptural, has exerted a holier influence on him, than my faith has exerted on me, he is better acquainted with his bible, and nearer heaven than I am.

It may be answered, *further*, that names must be used to designate parties, and that parties are necessary to a combined and effective effort in the dissemination of truth.

But the very existence of parties denotes a difference of opinion, and in this difference both parties cannot be right,—it is not improbable that both may be wrong,—and if combination is effective in the dissemination of *truth*, it may be equally effective in the dissemination of *error*. It may be remembered, too, by those who may agree with the party with which they are connected, in a few points, but disagree in many more, that they give their aid in the propagation of more of what they believe to be error, than what they believe to be truth.

Besides, after all, the truth that is propagated is not of half the value of the good spirit that is lost in the contest. It would require a great amount of good to counterbalance the evils of misconception, misrepresentation, change of affection, contention, of which party is the fruitful source. How has it disturbed the peace of neighbourhoods, and broken the ties of friendship!—How has it poisoned the cup of domestic happiness! thus,—in sad fulfilment of the Saviour's warning,—setting *father against son and son against father, so that a man's foes* are *those of his own household.*

I know that great practical importance is attached to the reception of certain doctrines which are the subjects of controversy.—I have had intimate official intercourse, during a ministry of twenty-two years,—with opportunities for this intercourse inferior, perhaps, to none,—with persons of various religious opinions. I have seen them in prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness. I have stood by the bed of death, and caught the last breathings of the departing spirit,—and I do now say, that I have witnessed the same gratitude and love, the same trust and devotion, the same patience and resignation, the same holy confidence and joy, among them all.

It hath not pleased the merciful Creator, I do firmly believe, to suspend the happiness, temporal or eternal, of his creatures, on the mode of faith, but, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, on the testimony of an approving conscience, enlightened by the word and the spirit of God.

That certain doctrines are better adapted to promote piety, and consequently peace of mind, than others, I have no doubt; and that it is the duty of *every man to be fully persuaded in his own mind* that he has the truth, from a serious, deliberate, devout inquiry, is to me equally clear; but it is not for any one to say that the peace which may be the result of such inquiry, is not, to him who enjoys it, an earnest of heaven.

It may be *still further* answered, that parties *do* exist, and *will* exist, in the christian world, do we what we may;—that it is too late now, when so many lines of separation are drawn, and so many names adopted, to think of uniting believers in Christ by the single name of christian.

It is never too late to remonstrate against evil opinions, or evil practices, however venerable by age, or however sanctioned by numbers; and, if parties do exist and will exist in the christian world, *we* need not join them. *Offences will come, but wo unto him by whom the offence cometh.* Contentions will arise, but *we* need not contend; for we are admonished that *the servant of* God *must not strive, but be gentle to all men.*

Nor need any fear that, by discarding party, and party names, they must stand alone,—though it would be an honorable distinction, and they might be content to enjoy it. But they will have many of the intelligent, judicious, and excellent, on their side. Yet more,—they will have "the glorious company of the apostles and martyrs," and "the spirits of the just

made perfect"—"a great cloud of witnesses"—on their side, for there are no parties in heaven. Calvin may be there, and Arminius may be there, and a host of others, who have unfortunately given their poor names to a party on earth, but there will be no one's disciples there, as such, but the disciples of Jesus Christ.

It may be answered *yet again*, that christianity itself was a sect when it was first promulgated.

Christianity was then, as it now is, a distinct religion, opposed indeed to heathenism, and, in some respects, to judaism; but in a very different sense from that in which one party of believers in this religion is opposed to another. This, I think, must be so obvious, on the least reflection, that I need not enlarge upon it. The objection has no bearing upon my reasoning on this subject, and therefore does not impair its force.

Once more, it may be said, in reply, that we of this communion are known as congregational, in contradistinction to episcopalian, and other denominations of christians.

It is true,—but this is a name which has respect only to forms,—to the outworks of the house of God,—and not to religious belief. We believe that the simple structure of the congregational church is more in conformity with that of the primitive church than any other. But if any still urge this as an objection, I am not at issue with them.—Retaining the substance, I care not for the name. It is the fundamental principle of congregationalism that each church is competent to the management of its own affairs; that it

may adopt its own faith and government and worship; and is amenable to no other than the great Head of the church. It ill becomes congregationalists, then, to contend for party. I might add, it but ill becomes those who are opposed to human *creeds*, to urge upon their christian brethren the adoption, as denoting their creed, of a human *name*.

In the remarks I have made, it has not been my intention to express an opinion respecting the good or ill effects of controversy. Differences of opinion are unavoidable, and the calm, dispassionate discussion of such differences, on individual responsibility, may be useful. It may excite inquiry, and awaken zeal, and elicit truth.

Still less has it been my intention to pass any other censure, than is implied by the expression of a difference of opinion, on those of my christian brethren who have seen fit to enlist themselves under the banners of a party. The right of judging and deciding, which I claim for myself,—and will maintain,—I concede to them, and respect the honest and fearless exercise of it. I belong not to their party, whatever it is; but I honour their devotion to what they believe to be the cause of truth and righteousness, and if this cause should really be promoted amidst the strife of parties, —yes,—if God should cause even the "*wrath* of man "to praise Him,"—*I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*

I have thus given a few reasons, my hearers, and I might give many more, for believing that we ought to be satisfied with the name which the disciples adopted

at Antioch,—the name of our divine Master.—Let us not be ambitious of exchanging this sacred name for any other. Let us not be ambitious of adding another to a name which in itself is enough to denote our religious faith, and which is hallowed by its association with "the author of our faith," and its adoption in the first age of the church. Let us endeavour, by the grace of God, to do honour to a name which confers so much honour on us. Whilst we study the sacred scriptures, and derive light from every quarter from which we can derive it, let us not suffer ourselves to be bound in the shackles of party, nor be subject, in matters of faith, to human authority,—*No,—not for an hour!*

It has seemed to me to be not unsuitable, brethren, at the consecration of a christian church, to set forth a humble plea for the christian name; nor unappropriate to the day which you have happily chosen for this consecration.—It is the day which is devoted by a large portion of the christian world to the commemoration of the nativity of the Prince of Peace. "Peace on earth and good will towards men" was the proclamation of the angels at the Saviour's birth!—To plead for the union of christians under the name of this Saviour is to sound a note in unison with the angelic song. I would that it were met by a full response from every heart in this assembly!—I would that the peaceful strain were uttered by every tongue that is hymning, on this day, the Redeemer's praise!—I would that it were mingled with every prayer that ascends from every christian altar!—that it were breathed from

every soul that bows itself *at the name of Jesus and confesses him to be Lord!*

In the spirit of peace the work, which we have come hither to consecrate by our prayers, was begun, carried on, and is ended. Those who differ, if I mistake not, in some respects, in their faith, have united in erecting this temple for the worship of the God of their fathers, in the mode in which their fathers worshipped. The blessing of God,—the God of peace,—has attended them. No obstacle has intervened to obstruct their progress; no root of bitterness has sprung up to trouble them; no untoward event has occurred to damp their present joy, or cloud their future prospects. May the good they have already experienced be the harbinger of good to come! May they never come up to this house but in the spirit of mutual kindness and love; and may no voice be ever heard within these walls but the voice of christian charity!

Peace be upon this house, like the dew on Hermon, like the dew which descended on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore!

APPENDIX.

The Third Congregational Society in Cambridge was incorporated June 16, 1827, and the corner stone of the meeting-house, erected by the Society, was laid the second day of August, 1827. Prayers were offered on the occasion by the Rev. Thomas B. Gannett, Pastor of the Second Congregational Society in Cambridge. The first sermon, preached before the Society, was by the Rev. Charles Lowell, D. D. July 22, 1827, from John xiii. 35.—"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." The meeting-house was dedicated on Christmas day, December 25, 1827, with the following

Religious Services.

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER,
By the Rev. Henry Ware, Jr.

READING OF THE SCRIPTURES,
By the Rev. Samuel Barrett.

DEDICATORY PRAYER,
By the Rev. Francis Parkman.

DEDICATORY HYMN,

WRITTEN BY THE REV. HENRY WARE, JUN.

O Thou, who for thyself didst raise
  Creation's wondrous frame,
To be a Temple to thy praise,
  An altar to thy name;

And yet art pleased to dwell below,
  And there thy name record
Where'er assembling mortals go
  To own their common Lord;

Oh, write thy name in favour here;
  And, while we bend in prayer,
Lord, bid thy glorious cloud appear
  Thy presence to declare.

As in thy gracious courts above,
  So in these courts below,
Reveal to every soul thy love,
  And heavenly peace bestow.

Here may thy holy will be learned,
  And here thy will be done;
Till all to truth and heaven be turned
  Through thy beloved Son;

Till all who kneel in worship here,
  Be faithfully prepared,
In higher temples to appear,
  Crowned with thy great reward.

SERMON,

By the Rev. CHARLES LOWELL, D. D.

ORIGINAL HYMN,

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM PARMENTER, ESQ.

Almighty Father! to thy name
Thy children earthly temples frame;
An entrance, let each house be found,
To mansions which thy throne surround.

And may this gathered flock behold
The Heavenly Shepherd guard its fold,
His sheltering arm extended show;
His guardian, fostering care bestow.

Lord! bless the sacred altar, where
We sound thy praise, or lift thee prayer,
Let every heart with fervour move,
As strong as faith, and pure as love.

The breast, where pious virtue glows,
Thine ever gracious blessing knows;
O guide each heart, instruct each mind
Thy will to serve, and Heaven to find.

CONCLUDING PRAYER,

By the Rev. JAMES WALKER.

BENEDICTION.

Officers of the Society, 1827.

JOSEPH N. HOWE, Jun. *Treasurer.*
WILLIAM WHITNEY, *Clerk.*

STANDING COMMITTEE.

William Parmenter,
Joseph N. Howe, Jr.
Sewall White,
Ephraim Buttrick,
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Abraham P. Sherman,
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